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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDED INFO ADDRESSEES)
E.O. 12356: N/A
TAGS: [PINR](#) [XA](#) [KISL](#)
SUBJECT: POLITICAL ISLAM IN BLACK AFRICA

"ROME FOR COBURN AND ALSO FOR VATICAN, LONDON FOR MC KINLEY, BRUSSELS FOR DUBROW, PARIS FOR PERLOW. USNATO FOR HAMILTON. BONN FOR KLEMP, USCINCEUR AND HQ US CENTRAL COMMAND FOR POLADS, HQ USEUCOM FOR EC J-5, COMMANDER USASETAF FOR G-2"

[1](#)1. THIS CABLE TRANSMITS AN INR MEMO OF JUNE 1 ON

"POLITICAL ISLAM IN BLACK AFRICA." THE MEMO IS A SUMMARY OF VIEWS EXPRESSED BY ACADEMICS AT A MAY 7 CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY INR AND, AS SUCH' DOES NOT REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT. YOUR COMMENTS ARE WELCOMED.

BEGIN SUMMARY

[1](#)2. AN INR CONFERENCE ON POLITICAL ISLAM IN BLACK AFRICA HELD ON MAY 7 CONCLUDED THAT:

--POLITICAL ISLAM THROUGHOUT THE MUSLIM WORLD IS NOT A MONOLITHIC FUNDAMENTALIST MOVEMENT' BUT A VARIED PHENOMENON, RANGING FROM REVOLUTIONARIES SUCH AS LEBANON'S HIZBALLAH TO REFORMERS IN JORDAN AND KUWAIT.

--ISLAMISTS ARE ROOTED IN BOTH THE PAST AND THE PRESENT. THEY HAVE MODERN EDUCATIONS (TURABI. THE LEADER OF THE NATIONAL ISLAMIC FRONT IN SUDAN, IS TRILINGUAL) AND EFFICIENT ORGANIZATIONS (INCLUDING FAXES AND CASSETTES).

--MILITANT BRANDS OF POLITICAL ISLAM DO NOT FOSE AN IMMINENT THREAT TO BLACK AFRICA. THE MAJORITY OF AFRICAN MUSLIMS BELONG TO MAINSTREAM MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS AND SUPPORT DEMOCRATIZATION AS A MEANS OF REFORMING CORRUPT GOVERNMENTS AND STAGNANT ECONOMIES. IF DEMOCRATIZATION FAILS, POLITICAL ISLAM COULD POSE A LONGER-TERM CHALLENGE TO STATES WITH LARGE MUSLIM POPULATIONS SUCH AS NIGERIA.

--THE SUDANESE REGIME HAS PLANS FOR PROPAGATING POLITICAL ISLAM BUT LACKS THE RESOURCES TO DO THIS. KHARTOUM IS NOT A THREAT TO NEIGHBORING UGANDA OR KENYA, WHERE MUSLIMS ARE SMALL INEFFECTIVE MINORITIES. A SUDANESE INVASION OF UGANDA, OR A SUDANESE LINK-UP WITH AN UGANDAN MUSLIM "FIFTH COLUMN" TO OVERTHROW MUSEVENI. ARE UNLIKELY.

--IRAN DOES NOT GIVE A HIGH PRIORITY TO BLACK AFRICA, AND ITS ATTEMPT TO GAIN INFLUENCE HAS HAD ONLY LIMITED

SUCCESS. ITS LONG RANGE OBJECTIVES ARE UNCLEAR.
TEHRAN'S GREATEST ATTRACTION IS ITS DEFIANCE OF THE WEST.

--THE REAL IMPACT OF POLITICAL ISLAM ON THE INTERESTS OF
THE U.S. AND THE WEST LIES IN THE SPREAD OF ISLAMIC
CULTURE. AS WESTERN CULTURAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, WHICH

ONCE HAD A CRITICAL IMPACT ON AFRICAN YOUTH, ARE
REDUCED, ISLAMIC STATES ARE FILLING THE GAP.

BEGIN TEXT

13. INR'S MAY 7 CONFERENCE ON POLITICAL ISLAM IN BLACK
AFRICA BROUGHT TOGETHER THE FOLLOWING ACADEMIC
SPECIALISTS: JOHN ESPOSITO, COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS;
JOHN VOLL, UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE; NELSON KASFIR,
DARTMOUTH COLLEGE; PRISCILLA STARRATT, NEW ENGLAND
COLLEGE; AND JOHN HUNWICK, NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY.

14. THE CHALLENGE OF POLITICAL ISLAM: ESPOSITO
PRESENTED A POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR CONSIDERING POLITICAL
ISLAM IN BLACK AFRICA. THE WEST TENDS TO "DEMONIZE"
POLITICAL ISLAM, PORTRAYING IT AS A MONOLITHIC
FUNDAMENTALIST THREAT TO WESTERN VALUES. THE REALITY IS
A WIDE SPECTRUM OF MOVEMENTS THAT STRETCHES FROM AFRICA
TO SOUTHEAST ASIA AND INCLUDES BOTH REVOLUTIONARIES AND
REFORMERS. REFORMERS CONSTITUTE THE MAJORITY AND HAVE
PARTICIPATED IN THE POLITICAL MAINSTREAM IN SUCH STATES
AS JORDAN AND KUWAIT.

15. WHAT MAKES ISLAMISTS APPEAR TO BE A THREAT IN
WESTERN EYES IS THEIR MODERNITY. ALTHOUGH THEY ROOT
THEIR PRESENT AND FUTURE GOALS IN PAST VALUES, THEY HAVE
MODERN EDUCATIONS, ARE ORGANIZED, AND OFTEN BECOME THE
LEADING OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS IN AUTHORITARIAN STATES.
THE MAJORITY OF MUSLIMS RELIGIOUS OR SECULAR, WANT
DEMOCRACY. THEY WISH TO LEGITIMIZE DEMOCRACY BY
REJUVENATING THE ISLAMIC CONCEPTS OF CONSULTATION AND
CONSENSUS. SIMILARLY, JEWS AND CHRISTIANS HAD TO
LEGITIMIZE DEMOCRACY, WHICH WAS ANTITHETICAL TO THEIR
TRADITIONAL BELIEFS (THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH DID NOT
ACCEPT POLITICAL PLURALISM UNTIL VATICAN II).

16. ATTEMPTS TO REPRESS ISLAMIST MOVEMENTS, SUCH AS
NASSER'S "DECAPITATION" OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD, WILL
STRENGTHEN AND RADICALIZE THEM. ALTERNATIVELY, IF
POLITICAL SYSTEMS BECOME MORE COMPETITIVE, SOME
ISLAMISTS MIGHT SELF-DESTRUCT, BUT OTHERS MIGHT BECOME
MORE PRAGMATIC AND RESPOND TO BROADER CONSTITUENCIES,
FOCUSING ON NATIONAL INTERESTS AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THE
INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

17. FORMER AF ASSISTANT SECRETARY HERMAN COHEN NOTED THE
U.S. PERCEPTION THAT POLITICAL ISLAM MEANS NASTY PEOPLE
USING ISLAM TO UNDERMINE U.S. INTERESTS. A REFERENCE
WAS MADE TO CHARLES KRAUTHAMMER'S RECENT ARTICLE
LABELING POLITICAL ISLAM THE "NEW COMINTERN." ESPOSITO
AND OTHER ACADEMICS ARGUED THAT THE CAPABILITIES OF THE
SUDANESE AND IRANIAN REGIMES HAVE BEEN OVERESTIMATED.

18. POLITICAL ISLAM IN SUDAN: JOHN VOLL EMPHASIZED THAT
THE NIF REGIME IN SUDAN IS NOT AN ABERRATION--A MOVEMENT
PUT IN POWER BY ISLAMIST CONSPIRATORS IN 1989 OR SPAWNED
BY THE IRANIAN REVOLUTION--BUT THE LOGICAL OUTCOME OF
LONG-TERM TRENDS. WHAT WOULD BE UNNATURAL WOULD BE A
SUDANESE REGIME WHICH WAS NON-RELIGIOUS OR ANTI-MUSLIM,
AND WHICH WAS UNINVOLVED IN THE AFFAIRS OF NEIGHBORING
STATES. HE SUPPORTED THESE CONCLUSIONS, AS FOLLOWS.

--SUDAN HAS HAD A SERIES OF ISLAMIST GOVERNMENTS SINCE
THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY, INCLUDING THE FAMOUS MAHDIYYA
(1884-1898). EVEN THE BRITISH CONDOMINIUM (1899-1956)
IDENTIFIED ITSELF AS A FRIEND OF ISLAM. IN THE
POST-1956 INDEPENDENCE PERIOD, NO SUDANESE ELECTED
GOVERNMENT HAS DISASSOCIATED THE STATE FROM ISLAMIST
TRADITIONS. THE NIF GOVERNMENT IS NOT THE FIRST TO TRY
TO UNIFY THE COUNTRY ON AN ISLAMIC BASIS. THE NIF IS
ONLY ONE STRAND OF POLITICAL ISLAM IN SUDAN, WHICH

INCLUDES TRADITIONAL POLITICAL PARTIES SUCH AS THE UMMA.

--SUDAN IS PART OF "SUDANIC AFRICA," A BELT OF CULTURAL INTERACTION EXTENDING FROM WEST AFRICA TO THE GULF OF ARABIA. AFRICANS MAKING THE PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA ARE IN MOTION ACROSS THE BELT, AND MANY SETTLE TEMPORARILY IN SUDAN. CONSEQUENTLY, SUDANESE THINK MORE IN TERMS OF AN EAST/WEST AXIS THAN A NORTH/SOUTH AXIS. SUDANESE INTEREST IN EGYPT HAS BEEN OVERSTATED; EGYPTIAN PEASANTS ARE NO MORE INTERESTED IN THE NIF THAN THEY WERE IN THE MAHDI. IN CONTRAST, THE POROUS SUDAN-CHAD BORDER FACILITATED QADHAFI'S INTERVENTION IN CHADIAN POLITICS AND ENABLED DEBY TO OVERTHROW THE PREVIOUS CHADIAN PRESIDENT. SUDAN'S EQUALLY POROUS EASTERN BORDER FACILITATES INTERACTION WITH ERITREA.

--IN THE DISCUSSION PERIOD, DR. ROBERT JENKINS OF THE HOUSE FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE QUOTED NIF OFFICIALS AS SAYING THAT "IF NECESSARY TO PROTECT OUR BROTHERS, WE WILL USE FORCE." ACCORDING TO VOLL, THE NIF IS NOT SAYING THAT IT WILL DISPATCH THE SUDANESE ARMY TO CONQUER AFRICA, BUT IS SAYING WHAT THE MUJAHADEEN, WHO WENT AS INDIVIDUALS TO FIGHT IN AFGHANISTAN, SAID--THAT EACH MUSLIM HAS THE OBLIGATION TO HELP OPPRESSED MUSLIMS ELSEWHERE.

¶9. THE NIF'S IMPACT IN EAST AFRICA: NELSON KASFIR ARGUED THAT THE NIF IS NOT A THREAT TO NEIGHBORING UGANDA AND KENYA, BUT COULD CAUSE SOME TROUBLE IN TANZANIA. THE SUDANESE REGIME IS EXTREMELY WEAK, BOTH POLITICALLY AND ECONOMICALLY. TURABI DOES NOT HAVE THE SUPPORT THAT HE DID A DECADE AGO. THE NIF STAGED ITS 1989 COUP TO KEEP FROM BEING FROZEN OUT OF POWER. THE NIF ALSO HAS ITS HANDS FULL IN THE SOUTHERN SUDAN. DESPITE NIF MILITARY GAINS AND SOUTHERN INSURGENT SPLITS, THE REGIME CANNOT BREAK THE INSURGENTS' HOLD ON THE SOUTHERN COUNTRYSIDE.

¶10. THE SUDANESE REGIME WILL CONTINUE TO BOMB THE UGANDAN BORDER AREAS OCCASIONALLY TO COUNTER MUSEVENI'S AID TO SOUTHERN INSURGENTS, BUT AN INVASION IS UNLIKELY. IT IS ALSO UNLIKELY THAT THE NIF COULD LINK UP WITH A "FIFTH COLUMN" OF UGANDAN MUSLIMS. MUSEVENI IS ON REASONABLY GOOD TERMS WITH MUSLIMS IN NORTHWESTERN UGANDA, AND MANY OF THE UGANDANS HE IS AT ODDS WITH IN THE NORTH AND NORTHEAST ARE CHRISTIANS. FURTHER, UGANDAN MUSLIMS ARE A SMALL, DIVIDED, SCORNFUL MINORITY (ESTIMATED AT 10 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION) WITH LITTLE POLITICAL CLOUT. MOST UGANDAN MUSLIMS ARE CONCERNED WITH THEIR LOCAL INTERESTS AND THE OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED BY MUSEVENI'S DEMOCRATIZATION PLANS.

¶11. KENYAN MUSLIMS ALSO ARE A SMALL, DIVIDED MINORITY (ESTIMATED AT FIVE TO SIX PERCENT OF THE POPULATION), OVERSHADOWED BY A LARGELY CHRISTIAN POLITICAL ELITE. MUSLIMS WHO LIVE ON THE COAST HAVE FELT ESPECIALLY MARGINALIZED SINCE INDEPENDENCE. THEY FORMED A MUSLIM PARTY IN 1992 TO COMPETE IN THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, WINNING TWO SEATS IN AN ALLIANCE WITH A MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY. THE MUSLIM PARTY APPEARS TO BE A COALITION OF PEOPLE WITH LOCAL GRIEVANCES BUT NO WEDGE FOR INTRODUCING RELIGION INTO THE POLITICAL ARENA.

¶12. TANZANIA, WITH A MUCH LARGER MUSLIM POPULATION (ESTIMATED AT 30-40 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION), MAY BE MORE RECEPTIVE TO SUDANESE PROSELYTIZING. IN APRIL 1993 THREE SUDANESE TEACHERS WERE DEPORTED FOR INCITING MUSLIMS AGAINST NON-MUSLIMS. ALTHOUGH AN AFRICAN CANNOT GET AHEAD IN UGANDA NOR KENYA BY BECOMING A MUSLIM, IT COULD BE ADVANTAGEOUS IN TANZANIA.

¶13. VOLL SAID THAT AN IRANIAN-ORIENTED BRAND OF POLITICAL ISLAM COULD APPEAL TO SMALL SEPARATE MUSLIM MINORITIES IN STATES SUCH AS SOUTH AFRICA AS A MEANS OF TRANSCENDING THEIR DIVISIONS. COUNTERING THE APPEAL IN SOUTH AFRICA IS THE DESIRE OF MUSLIMS, MALAY OR ASIAN, TO PARTICIPATE IN THE POST-APARTHEID DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM NOW BEING NEGOTIATED.

¶14. POLITICAL ISLAM IN WEST AFRICA: PRISCILLA STARRATT DISCUSSED POLITICAL ISLAM IN WEST AFRICAN STATES WHICH HAVE MAJORITY MUSLIM POPULATIONS. SHE ATTRIBUTED ITS GROWING APPEAL TO ECONOMIC DECLINE, INCREASING INEQUALITIES, AND CORRUPTION. MANY AFRICAN MUSLIMS BELIEVE THAT BOTH WESTERN CAPITALISM AND MARXISM' AS WELL AS THE NATION-STATE, HAVE FAILED THEM AND THEY ARE LOOKING FOR SOLUTIONS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THEIR OWN CULTURE. ISLAMIC GOVERNMENTS ARE VIEWED AS BEING JUST. SOME MUSLIMS SEE CHRISTIANITY AS A COLONIAL LEGACY AND BELIEVE THAT THE REESTABLISHMENT OF AN ISLAMIC STATE IN THE SUDANIC BELT, WHERE ISLAMIC EMPIRES FLOURISHED DURING THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES, WOULD BE THE FINAL STAGE OF DECOLONIZATION.

¶15. OVERALL, WEST AFRICAN MUSLIMS ARE DIVIDED ABOUT THE MERITS OF POLITICAL ISLAM, AND THERE ARE NO ACTIVE ISLAMIC PARTIES IN THE REGION. WEST AFRICANS, IN GENERAL, ARE PREOCCUPIED WITH CONSTRUCTING NEW DEMOCRATIC POLITICAL SYSTEMS WHICH OFFER HOPE FOR REFORM. IF DEMOCRATIZATION FAILS. POLITICAL ISLAM COULD BECOME MORE IMPORTANT, ESPECIALLY IN THE SUDANIC BELT.

¶16. STARRATT, WHO HAD LIVED FOR 15 YEARS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA, WAS CONCERNED ABOUT GROWING MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN TENSIONS IN THE NORTH AND IN NIGERIA AS A WHOLE. THESE TENSIONS CENTER ON SUCH ISSUES AS SHARI'A AND NIGERIA.S ATTEMPT TO JOIN THE ORGANIZATION OF ISLAMIC CONFERENCE. SHE WARNED THAT IF NIGERIANS FAIL TO REFORM THEIR CORRUPT GOVERNMENT AND REVIVE THEIR STAGNANT ECONOMY, ISLAMISTS COULD COME TO POWER WITHIN THE NEXT FEW YEARS. THIS ASSESSMENT MET WITH SKEPTICISM FROM MOST PARTICIPANTS.

¶17. BLACK AFRICA AND THE WIDER ISLAMIC WORLD: JOHN HUNWICK NOTED THAT PAN-ISLAMIC NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS ARE AS OLD AS ISLAM ITSELF. THE PILGRIMAGE TO MECCA WAS THE PRECURSOR OF THE FAX MACHINE AND CASSETTE TAPE. AFRICAN MUSLIMS TODAY PUBLISH THEIR BOOKS IN ENGLISH, FRENCH, AND ARABIC, STUDY IN EGYPT, SAUDI ARABIA, IRAN, MOROCCO AND LIBYA AND ATTEND INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC CONFERENCES. HUNWICK SAID THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE, WHICH INCLUDES 18 AFRICAN MEMBERS OUT OF 46, IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE OF THE PAN-ISLAMIC NETWORKS.

¶18. COMPETITION AMONG MIDDLE EASTERN STATES IN BLACK AFRICA WAS EXAMINED BY HUNWICK AND OTHER PARTICIPANTS:

--LIBYA: QADHAFI HAS USED A VARIETY OF MECHANISMS TO GAIN INFLUENCE. IN STATES WITH MUSLIM MINORITIES. HE HAS SOUGHT TO SUPPORT THOSE MINORITIES THROUGH THE OPENING OF ISLAMIC CULTURAL CENTERS AND THE DISPATCH OF MUSLIM MISSIONARIES AND ARABIC TEACHERS. IN STATES WITH SOCIALIST-ORIENTED REGIMES, SUCH AS BURKINA FASO, THE EMPHASIS HAS BEEN ON THE IDEOLOGY OF THE "GREEN BOOK." IN THE MUSLIM MAJORITY STATES OF THE SUDANIC BELT. HE HAS ALTERNATIVELY SUPPORTED AND ATTACKED REGIMES, INCLUDING THE SUDAN.

--IRAN: IRANIAN OBJECTIVES IN BLACK AFRICA ARE UNCLEAR, BUT THE ACADEMICS DID NOT BELIEVE THAT TEHRAN ASSIGNS A HIGH PRIORITY TO THE REGION. THE WEAKNESS OF THE IRANIAN ECONOMY CURBS TEHRAN.S FOREIGN POLICY AMBITIONS. IRAN'S PRIMARY INFLUENCE IN AFRICA IS INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL, DRAWING ON THE MODEL OF AN ISLAMIC REVOLUTION WHICH HAS STOOD UP TO THE WEST AND SURVIVED.

--SAUDI ARABIA: THE SAUDIS HAVE SUPPORTED RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA AND AID PROGRAMS, IN PART TO COUNTER THE INFLUENCE OF IRAN AND OTHER STATES.

¶19. MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRIES HAVE POURED CONSIDERABLE RESOURCES INTO AFRICA, FOR DEVELOPMENT, CULTURE, AND EDUCATION. THE ACADEMICS AGREED THAT THE SECOND CATEGORY WILL BEAR THE MOST FRUIT IN THE LONG RUN. VOLL

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